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Awakening of the global awareness

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Abstract

The most powerful event that mankind is facing today is the great awakening at planetary level which was being created throughout a whole millennium. We, human beings, are in the midst of enormous progress as a kind of a higher form of global awareness entering through cultures, religions and viewpoints during centuries.

Ecological globalization does not mean that same solutions should be applied everywhere. Planetary ecology is very heterogeneous. One of the challenges of globalized society is to enable people and institutions all around the world to respond to their local ecological situations, while at the same time a global perspective of their ecological influence is being maintained.

The science needed for managing the environment should no longer be preservation of the intellectual elite, but a set of rational tools available to everyone.

Not only should the economical capital be maximized but also the human and ecological capital. Furthermore, natural ecosystems such as coral reefs and tropical rain forests give interest in models for human society. They demonstrate how highly rich and productive communities can survive in impoverished environments.

A successful response to the globalization will require fundamental changes of human values, as separate individuals and as ones incorporated into governmental, corporative and economic structures of the society.

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1. The awakening of the global consciousness

The most powerful event that mankind is faced today is the great awakening on a planetary level which was being created for a whole millennium. Human beings are in the middle of huge progress as a species to a higher form of global awareness entering through cultures, religions and views of the world through the centuries. This awakening of the global consciousness is nothing else but a change, maturing from more egocentric ways of life to higher forms of integral and dialogical ways of life. The great spiritual traditions perceived a long time ago, that the key to our survival, sustainability and prosperity, urge our conscious evolution towards a dialogical way of life that brings to the surface our true moral, rational and spiritual nature as a species.

This transition, involves a direct confrontation and joint creation of a common foundation among the views of the world – the fundamental Logos which is the source of different cultural and religious views. It can be seen from this that the essential source of chronic violence and destruction of human relations results from the egocentric ways. The key for stopping the violence among cultures, and for the progress of global cultures and peace, non-

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violence and mutual improvement, is our individual and collective progress as human beings who live in the manner of deepest and true dialogue. Today's transition has reached its critical point, and the only and most important event that mankind is facing now, and also the key to our future, is this progress of the awakened global consciousness.

1.1. What is "global consciousness"?

The awakening of the global consciousness is a new and monumental event in the evolution of mankind. Great scene in the human drama which is obviously not ready, as people tend to process reality from their own perspective, view of life, or through the narrative or cultural prism. We have access to the global consciousness only when we are able to stop for a moment and gain a critical distance from our localized personal perspective and to enter the wider sphere of the global perspective in the awakening of the global consciousness.

1.2 Global consciousness and the perspectives of global education

The students of today will be facing more often the new world order which will unavoidably require global education. They will daily be in contact with people with different ethnical, racial, linguistic and socio-economic backgrounds, and they will also face some of the most serious problems. Because of this there is a need for a relevant curriculum which will help the students with different world views to comprehend the concept of globalization, as well as the role of global education.

All the children have the right to be educated and have to be given the means to help them develop attitudes, knowledge and skills necessary for them to have in order to become competent, responsible and humane citizens of their community. They should develop cross-cultural skills and attitude so as to become effective citizens in the pluralistic society full of variety.

One of the first experts who gave a clear definition of the concept of globalization and global consciousness is Hanvey (1976). In his definition he gives five dimensions that prepare the student for the global consciousness and global thinking. These dimensions: perspective consciousness, state-of-the-planet awareness, cross-cultural awareness, knowledge of global dynamics and awareness of human choices.

1.3 Perspective consciousness

This consciousness refers to an awareness and respect for other people's views of the world. Therefore, they can vary a great deal, with profound differences. Perspectives are shaped by many factors among which are ethnical, religious and social status, as well as age and sex. These differences, as said by Haavenson et al. (1998/99), "have been one of the main causes of conflict and confrontation in the history of mankind". They also say that, "it is important to teach students to look upon a certain phenomenon or event from different perspectives so as to encourage respect and appreciation for beliefs, customs, and values different from their own".

1.4 State-of-the-planet awareness

For this awareness we need to understand the global issues. Children should be made aware that everything that affects the world, also affects them. Even in elementary school the students can be taught to make decisions about the ways of preventing the catastrophe, by studying the consequences of ecological illiteracy.

1.5. Cross-cultural awareness

The third dimension-cross-cultural awareness-understands that there is a diversity of ideas and practices in human societies, and that these could be found all around the world. According to Hanvey (1976) this dimension is the hardest to acquire by students as it is related to the highest level of global cognition. One of the effective ways of

promoting the cross-cultural awareness is by showing video materials and encouraging discussions after their watching in order to help students to distinguish stereotypical views from those that are more authentic.

1.6. Knowledge of global dynamics

This dimension is about how to grasp that the world is an interconnected system of complex characteristics and mechanisms and unforeseen consequences. Students learn how to identify subtle relations of reason and result, to predict side effects and make decisions about eliminating or changing unwanted consequences.

1.7 Awareness of human choices

It focuses on making choices and developing a sense of responsibility for making decisions that will have influence on the generations yet to come. It nurtures the sense of responsible citizenship on local and global levels. Students are required to explain their choice and to learn how to be tolerant toward other people's views.

2. Global awareness elements

Case (1993) identified five essential elements that keep the people informed about global topics. The first element describes universal values and cultural practices. The second one includes global mutual relationships in relation to the study of four main interactive global systems: economic, political, ecological and technological. The third element represents the world issues as development and peace. The fourth shapes the backgrounds and past patterns of world events, as for example are global history and geography. The last one represents alternative future trends in world events.

The fact that the ecological health of the world is as important as taking care of the whole mankind should be specially emphasized, and that these two must work simultaneously.

Global education comprises interconnectedness of communities, countries and nations, as well as mutual relations of social and natural phenomena. For students who are able to think independently and to look critically on social changes the classroom will be a more exciting and challenging place. Engaging students to learn through dialogue makes the way of acquiring knowledge and competence much easier.

The most effective way of engaging students to learn about global perspectives is to teach them to observe the world as a planetary society and to understand the mutual dependency of human beings. The greatest philosopher of the 20-th century Albert Schweitzer who developed the basic principle of universal ethics – a principle of reverence before life – wrote: “I am life with wants to live among other lives who also want to live.... The essence of the good is the preservation of life....The essence of the evil is the destruction of life, the prevention of life from its development”. For the first time in history the physical survival of human beings depends on radical changes in human hearts (Erich Fromm).

3. Environmental education: Goals, tendencies paradigms

The goal of environmental education is to teach every person to live in the environment in complete conformity with his ethical and scientific ideas about this environment.

The burning of coal, oil and gas causes green house effect. Modern arms race aggravates ecological problems, hampers the development of many countries. Industry and agriculture pollute the soil, air, rivers and seas. The gap between rich and poor countries becomes more and more significant. The uncontrolled growth of the population of the Earth requires the use of greater amounts of natural resources. Acid rains destroy forests and pollute the waters of the Ocean. The destruction forests causes floods, reduces the amount of oxygen in the atmosphere. The global ecological crisis coverts all parts of the Earth. The Earth is turning into a fruitless desert...

For the first time in history people widely change and transform their environment. The way people change the external nature corresponds to the way they transform their internal, psychological, spiritual-moral environment. The destruction of natural environment is the result of man's spiritual degradation and that of the society as a whole.

At the same time the development of modern science and technologies cannot lead mankind to complete despair and deep pessimism. Today they help to solve ecological problems and teach us to live in harmony with nature.

Environmental education can rescue life and our planet from a total destruction and complete degradation. It can catalyze good changes in global community. It can be an important factor of the humane, fair sustainable development of the Earth in the foreseeable future. A lot depends on the attention given to this extremely urgent problem in all countries of the world. In general success is determined by the fact how this problem is perceived and interpreted by the global community. Environmental education rather gives us an unusual point of view on the problems of education and development of children than creates different "recipes" for the solution of various pedagogical problems.

Special goals of environmental education include the formation of diverse experience in the sphere of nature protection activities, the creation of pedagogical technologies and the methods forming the person's responsible attitude toward the environment

Can modern Environmental education be put in the widely accepted pedagogical practice or should it cause large-scale changes in the educational systems and its paradigms? The answer to this question can be only affirmative. Modern Environmental education requires significant paradigm shifts in the philosophy, theory and technique of school education.

In my research work I use the term "Environmental education" treating it as a certain general approach to the formation of the pupils' responsible attitude towards nature and of ecological culture as a whole by means of all school subjects. In this respect my "Environmental education" and "ecological education" are very similar concepts.

An important factor of environmental education is a school that carries out education in close contacts with the family, mass media, NGOs, social environment as a whole. This approach to a certain extent overcomes the attitude to knowledge and skills as to ultimate goals of education. In my opinion knowledge and skills are just means necessary for the development of children, psychological tools for the formation of the person's responsible attitude towards nature.

The importance of Environmental education for the development of children lies in mastering the system of outlook ideas, ecological and moral-ecological concepts, practical skills, ecological culture and system ecological thinking. It is quite obvious that the system thinking is the most important thing in solving ecological problems.

Today in all countries of the world there arises an extremely important problem. It is the creation of a new methodology of Environmental education allowing investigating various models of an ecologically responsible choice at different hierarchical levels of living systems: from local to global, from a person to the planet as a whole. The basis for this methodology may lie in certain fundamental ethical values common for all people.

The basis of the psychological mechanism of forming the person's ecological responsibility is a step – by – step process of accumulating and contradictions between a real level of attitude to nature and a potentially possible level, the achievement of which is the goal of environmental education.

4. Principles and potential of environmental education

Environmental education may have the potential to save the Earth – or it may not. Much depends upon the extent to which environmental education is taken up in all societies, and what form it takes. In turn, this depends upon how environmental education is perceived and understood.

Environmental education is a broad approach to education. The former, because it has allowed environmental education to challenge narrowly-based educational approaches, yet also the latter because environmental education has always uneasily with traditional models of educational thinking and institutional organizations. Environmental education is an instrument to achieving a sustainable world.

The foundation stones of environmental education were laid by Sir Patrick Geddes, a Scottish Professor of Botany. Many writes credit Geddes (1854-1933) as “the father environmental education”. He was perhaps the first to make the vital link, now fundamental to environmental education, between the quality of the environment and the quality of education. His Outlook Tower, which still stands in Edinburg, may be regarded as the first field studies centre. Here, Geddes pioneered many innovative techniques and ideas which anticipated the approaches of modern environmental education, including use of the outdoor environmental and learning by doing, interdisciplinary and education of the “whole person”.

According to Disinger (1983), the first use of the term was by Thomas Pritchard at a meeting of International union for conservation of natural resources in Paris in 1948.

In 1970 IUCN/ Unescointernacional working meeting on “environmental education in the school curriculum” met in Nevada, USA. It was at that gathering that the first widely adopted definition of environmental education was formulated: “Environmental education is the process of recognizing values and clarifying concepts in order to develop skills and attitudes necessary to understand and appreciate the interrelatedness among man, his culture and his biophysical surroundings”

Environmental education may be seen as a key part of the movement to improve the use and care of the environment and achieve a shift towards more sustainable societies, locally and globally. There have been many attempts to define “environmental education” more closely than this. A final definition is perhaps impossible as it is too all – embracing; befitting a medium which in the opinion of many, could help decide the date or destiny of both people and planet. An over prescriptive definition, moreover, may be undesirable it limits the potential, vision or scope of environmental education approach to education if it is to be understood, practiced and disseminated.

Environmental education: Is a life – long process; Is interdisciplinary and holistic in nature and application; concerns the interrelation ships and interconnectedness between and natural systems; views the environment in its entirety including social, political, economic, technological, moral, aesthetic and spiritual aspects; encourages the classification of values and the development of values sensitive to the environment etc..

Conclusion

At the end of the 1990-ies in international public consciousness there strengthened the understanding of the fact that the true safety of mankind can be based only on the combination of humanitarian and ecological safety, that the solution of global ecological crises can be found only in the feeling of the cultural entity and respect to all living beings.

In the same years there became obvious an idea about the equality of all living beings in the biosphere and the Earth as a whole. It has become a great stimulus for the transition from the philosophy of anthropocentrism to the philosophy of eco-centrism.

According to this philosophy, man is in the center of nature. It considers nature as a certain reality primarily intending to be a source of diverse resources and means for man’s life.

In the area of global education many more things are left to be researched. Informed educators are needed who will know how to present the global awareness issues and how to create an atmosphere of confidence in the classroom. The role of the teacher is to create a successful classroom.

We, modern educators, should implant into our students the curiosity about the world and the desire to work together on the creation of our future world as a better and healthier place to live in. We should create a place where all the races and cultures of the world will be able to learn how to respect other people’s worldviews, where all the perspectives are respected and encouraged, and we should make a place where all students could work and live as responsible citizens, not only of their own pluralistic society, but of the world.

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